

# PUBLIC SERVICE REVIEW

WINTER 2020 | VOLUME 1 | ISSUE 1



## Six feet Apart, TUgether in Service

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WINTER 2020 | VOLUME 1 | ISSUE 1

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The Stennis Center for Public Service (SCPS) is a bipartisan, bicameral federal legislative branch agency created by Congress in 1988 to promote and strengthen the highest ideals of public service in America. Public Service Review is a publication of the SCPS. The journal is published four times a year. The online version is available at [www.stennis.gov](http://www.stennis.gov).

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# Letter from **THE EDITOR**

On behalf of the Stennis Center for Public Service, it is my pleasure to welcome you to this inaugural edition of *Public Service Review*. The Stennis Center for Public Service is a bipartisan, bicameral federal legislative branch agency created by Congress in 1988 to promote and strengthen the highest ideals of public service in America. The Stennis Center develops and delivers a portfolio of unique programs and resources for young people, leaders in local, state, and federal government, and congressional staff.

One of the Stennis Center's specific duties outlined by Congress is to "foster a sense of civic responsibility among the youth of the United States," which is straight from the Stennis Center's enabling legislation (P.L. 100-458—Oct. 1, 1988; Subtitle B). What you hold in your hands is the latest effort to do just that – attract young people to public service – through *young voices for service*.

*Public Service Review* is a journal dedicated to the publication and dissemination of young people's reflections and experiences in the public service sector through professional or volunteer opportunities. The purpose of this journal is to acknowledge and influence the important and substantive work carried out by young people in local, state, and federal government entities, universities and colleges, and nonprofit organizations across the United States. This edition will introduce you to 13 dedicated students from 11 universities who share their stories—from how their childhood experiences influenced their desire for service to how the COVID-19 pandemic changed their approach to service and beyond.

This edition also introduces several features that we hope you will enjoy. It includes student interviews with current members of Congress on topics related to public service. In this issue, we feature two members of the Stennis Center's Board of Trustees—U.S. Sen. Chris Coons (D-DE) and U.S. Sen. Roger Wicker (R-MS)—who spoke on their work on the Cultivating Opportunity and Response to the Pandemic through Service Act (CORPS Act). *Public Service Review* also features "Reflections from Capitol Hill," in which current and former interns share what it is like to work on the Hill. We also want to highlight students and young voices from members' congressional districts. If a member of Congress would like to spotlight a student or young person from his or her congressional district, please email me at [brian@stennis.gov](mailto:brian@stennis.gov).

Please note: You do not need to wait for the print edition to read the latest *Public Service Review*. All editions of the journal will be available online on our website, [www.stennis.gov](http://www.stennis.gov).

We also value your feedback. If you have any thoughts or suggestions, or if you would like to recommend a young person to spotlight in the journal, please email me at [psreview@stennis.gov](mailto:psreview@stennis.gov). It is imperative that we continue to enhance our programs and resources to better serve you and our commitment to public service.



Dr. Brian Pugh  
Executive Director  
Stennis Center for Public Service





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# Aminata Sy

AMERICAN UNIVERSITY

*An Atypical Journey to American Diplomacy*

**I**t was Friday, Nov. 9, 2018, at 1:56 pm when I received an email from the Rangel Program that read in part: “Congratulations on being selected as a 2019 Charles B. Rangel International Affairs Graduate Fellow!” Since that day, life as a Rangel Fellow has been both incredibly challenging and rewarding. The Rangel Program trains diverse Americans from underrepresented groups in U.S. diplomacy to become Foreign Service Officers or diplomats. The Rangel Program helps pay for fellows’ graduate studies, offers internships in the U.S. Congress and American embassies, and secures careers in the American diplomatic corps upon completing the fellowship.

I want to become a U.S. diplomat because of a deep desire to serve America while bringing my multicultural and multilingual background to the career. I also have an interest in learning about different people and cultures around the world. I came to America from Senegal as a low-income, non-English-speaking high school dropout in 2001 to join my husband. I have since become a mother of three, earned my GED diploma and an associate degree and bachelor’s

degree, and am currently pursuing a master’s degree as a second-year graduate student at American University. My journey to U.S. diplomacy is possible because of America’s generosity.

## U.S. SENATE INTERNSHIP

I graduated from the University of Pennsylvania on May 20, 2020. I then headed to Washington, D.C., that same afternoon to begin an internship in the office of U.S. Sen. Jack Reed of Rhode Island the next day. Over the next ten weeks, I coordinated family life with my husband, spending the weekdays in Washington and coming home to Philadelphia on weekends. I met members of Congress, attended committee hearings, worked on policy issues, participated in events and professional development sessions, and spent many hours on the U.S. Senate floor and U.S. House of Representatives gallery watching the policy-making process. One of my favorite memories was watching C-SPAN as Sen. Reed asked for the unanimous consent of the Senate on June 19, 2019, for me to be given privileges of the floor for the remainder of my internship in his office. Then I received the Congressional Record printed



with all of the Senate and House floors activity of that day, including my name! I had a front-row seat to America's democracy through my Senate internship and left with a renewed sense of optimism for our country and people.

### **U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE VIRTUAL INTERNSHIP**

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, I planned to intern at the U.S. Embassy Dakar. Despite a change in plans caused by the global pandemic, the Rangel Program and the U.S. Department of State provided an enriching virtual summer 2020 training opportunity. I learned so much about U.S. diplomacy from many diplomats around the world, including current and former ambassadors. I also learned through writing a policy paper, memos, and other documents. I enjoyed the training sessions, including two featuring U.S. Ambassador to Senegal Tulinabo Mushingi and U.S. Ambassador to Zimbabwe Brian Nichols. I look forward to carrying the insights gained from this experience into my career.

### **GRADUATE SCHOOL AND THE U.S. FOREIGN SERVICE**

I have continued graduate studies at American University since the fall of 2019, traveling from Philadelphia to Washington twice a week for classes until the school switched to virtual teaching due to COVID-19. And during the fall of 2020, I put my public policy training into practice. Through the African Community Learning Program, the nonprofit organization I founded, I wrote a policy brief on education inequities in Philadelphia's public schools and recommendations on culturally responsive teaching measures. I intend to send the policy brief to Philadelphia's mayor and city council members, asking that they consider my recommendations to improve public education in our city. I plan to graduate with a master's degree in public policy with a concentration in international development in May 2021 and enter the U.S. Foreign Service to become a diplomat.

My journey to U.S. diplomacy has been challenging and full of rewards. The Rangel Program has provided me with solid training in U.S. diplomacy. I would encourage others to pursue careers in public service.

TOP: Aminata Sy's first visit to the U.S. Department of State in spring 2016 MIDDLE: Aminata Sy attends a U.S. congressional hearing in summer 2019. BOTTOM: Aminata Sy listens to U.S. Ambassador to Senegal Tulinabo Mushingi in summer 2020.







**K**alyn McDonough is a doctoral candidate in the Biden School of Public Policy and Administration at the University of Delaware. Her research interests focus on social determinants of health (SDoH) and health equity, physical activity as a determinant of health, and public policy's role in achieving health equity. She is the recipient of the 2020 Excellence in Graduate Scholarly Community Engagement from the University Faculty Senate and the 2020-2021 Dissertation Fellowship. She has an anticipated defense date of spring 2021 and hopes to continue to teach and conduct research within academia.

Read her interview with U.S. Sen. Chris Coons (D-DE) on the Cultivating Opportunity and Response to the Pandemic through Service Act (CORPS Act), which calls for strengthening and expanding AmeriCorps and Senior Corps to help our nation recover from COVID-19.

**Kalyn McDonough: Your history and commitment to public service are evident. Where does the passion come from? What inspired you to get into public service?**

Sen. Coons: As you know, which I think is often the case, basically from my parents and my community. I grew up in a family where we went to church regularly, and my church was active in various service activities. Because we were Presbyterians, we didn't talk much about it – the times my dad spent volunteering at the state prison or the times my mom spent helping a refugee family and volunteering at the Emmanuel dining room. The connection to our faith was more implicit than explicit. It was just sort of what you do as a good person. And I was active in the Boy Scouts. Our next-door neighbor was my scoutmaster. I belonged to a good, active troop – troop 803. Both in school and the Boy Scouts and my youth group at church, I got strong messages about what it means to have a life of meaning and purpose – through helping others. I got a pretty heavy dose of that. And then, when my own family went through some difficult times, how the neighbors, friends from church, classmates from school helped me realize the life of service is one of give and take. You can both be someone who cares for, supports, nurtures, and tries to improve your community. But you know, in tough times in life, we all at some point need some help.



**Kalyn McDonough: You have been a long-standing advocate for national service. What do you think is the value of national service to our country and volunteers?**

Sen. Coons: I launched and ran one of the first national direct AmeriCorps program decades ago through the national “I Have A Dream” Foundation. We had about 150 AmeriCorps members in 15 cities. And the value that I saw was both direct and indirect. These AmeriCorps members were doing a great job of mentoring and tutoring and setting up summer and afterschool programs for kids in tough schools and growing up in difficult circumstances. The folks they supported, both by organizing other volunteers and parents, to be part of the mentoring, teaching, and afterschool programs were additive and supportive for kids. For a second, I saw AmeriCorps members who were a part of that program and span a wide range of ages – I think our youngest was 21 years of age, and our oldest was 61 years of age with a wide range of backgrounds. They built real relationships with each other and exposed them to what it meant to be a Northerner, Southerner, Westerner, black, Latino, white, straight, gay, a person of deep religious faith, or an atheist. I mean, I got to

see these teams, these corps of Americans, learning more about their country and themselves as they were making a difference for others. I think national service, which I mean the AmeriCorps program in this conversation, is a great part of weaving us back together, creating pathways of opportunities, and making a lasting difference in our communities across the country.

**Kalyn McDonough: You introduced the CORPS Act in June 2020, and it has support from 150 national service and public health organizations. Could you tell us more about the bill and its designed purpose?**

Sen. Coons: The CORPS Act would double the number of available positions for AmeriCorps from 75,000 to 150,000 and increase them again in the second and third years. Ultimately, we would get to the level authorized ten years ago in the Edward M. Kennedy National Service Act, 250,000 positions a year. It would also raise how much AmeriCorps members make in a year through their service in their living stipend and education award. One criticism of AmeriCorps has long been that AmeriCorps members are compensated really at minimum wage. So, they make about \$15,000 per year, which is not a lot to live on. And their edu-



TOP: Kalyn McDonough interviewing U.S. Senator Coons

cational award, a Pell Grant, is just about \$6,000, which means their total annual compensation is below \$20,000 for a full-time year of service to our country. By increasing that, we can attract a broader range of folks with different backgrounds. We can make it more compelling, although, right now, we have four and five times as many applicants as there are positions. But we can also move toward a national culture where service is an expectation of citizenship, growing up in America and being a part of our society. I think generations passed have known the wisdom, impact, and value of national service. It's time for another generation of Americans to see and learn the same thing.

**Kalyn McDonough: So many Americans know first-hand how the COVID-19 pandemic has created both a health and economic crisis. How do you see the bill responding and supporting recovery during this crisis?**

Sen. Coons: There is a wide range of existing AmeriCorps programs. There are 54 state and territorial commissions appointed by governors that bring together leaders in the nonprofit, for-profit, and public sectors. These commissions decide on the priorities in their state for AmeriCorps each year. So, there are already, on the ground, existing AmeriCorps programs that are responding to the pandemic, like helping schools reopen safely and helping food banks. Nutrition programs help vulnerable seniors connect to their communities and access telemedicine/telehealth and medication. A large Conservation Corps is rebuilding our public land and making our state and national parks easier to visit and

more sustainable. There is a wide range of programs that do everything from helping veterans to helping seniors. I think the pandemic has impacted every aspect of our country and society. So, a lot of things I've just described are the ways in which AmeriCorps, if doubled in scope, would make more of a difference in this national, challenging moment.

**Kalyn McDonough: The CORPS Act has good, bipartisan support with co-sponsors from both sides of the aisle. What do you think it is about community service that brings people together? What do you think it can do to bring our nation together at this divisive time?**

Sen. Coons: AmeriCorps has an almost unique ability to show Americans the differences across our backgrounds, regions, and country and help them hear and see each other. You are not meeting in the context of a political firing match. You are not listening to your political views repeated back to you, whether on social media or cable. You are working alongside someone, serving alongside them, and then getting to know they have different political, religious, world views about many different issues. It's not who they might vote for, but also how they see our country and our place in it. So, I think it is a great way to help weave back together a country that has become badly frayed. The best way to address division in America is to address it locally, in person, by doing things that create value for our communities and society. So, I think this is an almost uniquely positive answer to this moment of division in our country.



*I belonged to a good, active troop – troop 803. Both in school and the Boy Scouts and my youth group at church, I got strong messages about what it means to have a life of meaning and purpose – through helping others.*



U.S. Sen. Coons





The tall fences and guarded entrance that I passed each day on my way to school had been a familiar sight since I was in kindergarten. While the restaurants, parks, homes, and stores that dotted my hometown of Vicksburg, Mississippi, were certainly nothing out of the ordinary, the facilities that arose across hundreds of acres behind those gated barriers yielded a separate world that stirred my imagination. Although a small town in the Mississippi Delta seems like it would be an unlikely location for a high-security military research installation, those high fences guarded the headquarters of the U.S. Army Engineer Research and Development Center (ERDC). ERDC houses some of the nation's most advanced and important STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) research projects. Within ERDC's laboratories, some of the country's most powerful supercomputers generate computerized simulations of natural disasters, military and structural engineers test the next generation of explosion-proof shelter designs, and bioengineers and environmental scientists investigate revolutionary new techniques in water purification.

As the massive gates to this mystical realm swung open before me for the first time, it felt strange to finally enter this place of scientific achievement and mystery after all those years. It felt even stranger to think that, only a few days after my high school graduation, I was now one of the youngest research interns employed inside the gates of ERDC.

ERDC, a division of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) and the broader U.S. Department of Defense (DOD), aims to "solve our nation's most challenging problems in civil and military engineering, geospatial sciences, water resources, and environmental sciences for the Army, Department of Defense, civilian agencies, and our Nation's public good." Employing over 2,100 public servants and operating on an annual research budget exceeding \$1 billion, ERDC encompasses seven different state-of-the-art laboratories scattered throughout the country:

- Cold Regions Research Engineering Laboratory;
- Construction Engineering Research Laboratory;
- Geospatial Research Laboratory;



TOP: U.S. Army Engineer Research and Development Center (ERDC) headquarters in Vicksburg, Miss.

- Coastal Hydraulics Laboratory;
- Information Technology Laboratory;
- Environmental Laboratory, and;
- Geotechnical and Structures Laboratory.

Founded in October 1988, ERDC “strives to be the world’s premier public engineering and environmental sciences research and development organization.” While not what one might consider as traditional “public service” careers, the engineers, researchers, scientists, and computer specialists at government research laboratories across the United States are on the frontlines to solve critical issues that face local communities, the U.S. military, the country, and the world.

My love for the sciences developed early on and led me to take the maximum number of honors and Advanced Placement (AP) courses available at my small, local high school. I constantly sought to understand the world better and wanted to play a significant role in improving it. Growing up in Vicksburg, I was aware of the internship opportunities that ERDC laboratories provided for high school, undergraduate, and graduate students, which led me to apply for my first internship in ERDC’s world-class Environmental Laboratory (EL). Ultimately, I was employed by ERDC for 24 weeks over two years through two different internship programs.

Going straight from dissecting frogs in AP Biology and conducting rudimentary exothermic reactions in high

school chemistry to working in a major military STEM center was a huge jump. I dove headfirst into a world of research and experimentation so advanced that it seemed straight out of a science fiction movie.

Much of the research I participated in at ERDC centered around graphene, a newly discovered substance composed of a single atomic layer of carbon. Graphene is of specific interest to many scientists because of its numerous incredible properties, including being stronger than steel and more electrically conductive than copper. My work with this revolutionary compound focused on its applications in water filtration membranes, which could be used to filter contaminants out of aqueous solutions.

As part of my research, I created liquid solution mixes of graphene, chitosan (a derivative of chitin, the primary component found in crustacean and insect shells), and other examined substances. These solutions were then poured into specially designed molds to create solid membranes and tested by pumping various degrees of contaminated water through them. The filtered water samples’ purity was subsequently analyzed to determine the types of membranes that most effectively prevented the contaminated particles from remaining in the water sample.

My time at ERDC opened my eyes to the intricacies of scientific studies. The test tubes, colored solutions, and



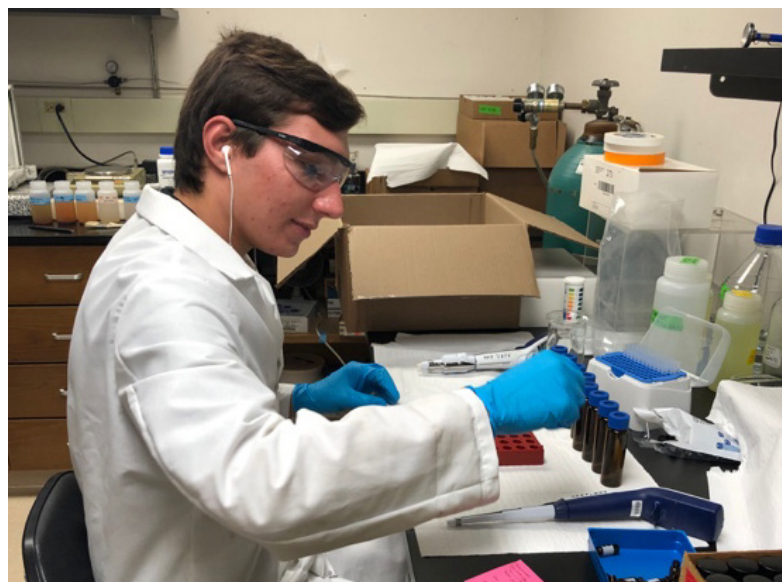
datasheets that I had worked with in high school were present in much greater depth and detail in the EL. More important than these physical aspects of research is the spirit of collaboration and innovation that exists within ERDC and other public research institutions across the country. This cooperation brings together ideas and practices to create new and exciting ways of solving our communities' most urgent issues. Being immersed in this research environment helps all of those involved push the boundaries of science and work to bring about a better world through experimentation and problem-solving. Through all of my experiences working with ERDC researchers, I gained a better understanding of the incredible intellect that these STEM-minded public servants have and the passion and desire that drives them to improve people's lives all around the world.

My work with graphene was only one of many studies in the Environmental Engineering Branch and the EL that involved the carbon-based substance. To share and recognize these various research projects, I traveled with other USACE employees to Washington, D.C., to attend the American Graphene Summit on Capitol Hill. The summit featured industry leaders, academic researchers, international scientists, and DOD engineers who presented and discussed ground-breaking studies from around the globe related to graphene.

The summit gave me a greater appreciation and understanding of the massive reach STEM has in every facet of our lives and success as a nation. I witnessed both the incredible international collaboration that exists to promote scientific advancement and the connections that link the STEM fields to the broader governmental, legislative, educational, and industrial sectors of public service.

My internship experience helped me see the different types of careers that serve the public good in every discipline of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics. Whether through biomedical research with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, physics and aerospace engineering work with the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, chemistry research at the National Institutes of Health, or water filtration membrane studies at ERDC, the opportunities available to make an impact on this world and its inhabitants through the STEM fields are endless.

The need for scientific advances in medicine, engineering, environmental studies, cybersecurity, and countless other essential areas is ever-growing. America is becoming more dependent on gifted STEM students to answer the call to service and use their talents to improve and protect our country and the planet. Our nation's future success does not rely only on good legislative, administrative, and judicial leadership. It also requires researchers who will build a better world through collaboration, creativity, intellect, and a powerful desire to help those around us.



TOP: Ryan Jarratt prepares samples for testing in one of the U.S. Army Engineer Research and Development Center's (ERDC) lab facilities in Vicksburg, Miss. BOTTOM: U.S. Army Corps of Engineers researchers, including Ryan Jarratt (far right), at the American Graphene Summit with U.S. Senator Roger Wicker (center).



**F**or as long as I can remember, I have felt like a sprinter racing along a track. As a child, I raced from elementary school to middle school to high school, always grasping for the next achievement. As a teenager, I continued my sprint from high school to the College of William & Mary with my sights set on independence. I kept racing as I ascended through college and earned admission to Yale Law School. I collected experiences all designed to further me in the long race – I worked a summer in the office of Sen. Mark Warner of Virginia, and I worked in a law firm. I ran faster. And I am sure I will continue racing when I arrive at Yale with adulthood and a career finally in my sights. However, this year I am electing to step off the track to take time for something different.

I will not be sitting in a classroom at Yale Law School this year. Instead, I will be sitting in a classroom in an under-resourced Washington, D.C., public school. They call it a gap year, but I expect it will be full. I was inspired by a group of friends who answered the call to serve following their college graduations. My friends each decided to serve causes about which they are passionate: fighting wildfires in California, assisting

individuals with mental health and substance use disorders in Montana, building trails and controlling invasive species along the Mississippi River, and protecting watersheds along the Atlantic seaboard.

Hearing my friends' stories made me realize the time to serve is now. This is my story.

When I began the seventh grade, my biggest dream was to play tackle football. It was great for about 3 hours. Then I got tackled, dislocated my elbow, and my dream of a football career was over. It was the luckiest break in my life. Instead of playing football, I spent the fall planning my service project for my Bar Mitzvah. It was then, as a seventh grader, that I discovered my passion for working with children. I decided to lead elementary school kids from my local Boys and Girls Club in a lesson about Judaism, and I went door-to-door on weekends to raise over \$2,000 for club activities. The experience left me feeling warm, but it also gave me a sense of purpose. For the first time in my life, I had done something real and helped make other people's lives a little bit better.

Continued on page 16



# HELPING SOMEONE FIND THEIR STRENGTH ENHANCES YOURS

COME CY AT [CITYYEAR.ORG](http://CITYYEAR.ORG)







After my experience with the Boys & Girls Club, I began looking for more opportunities to work with children. I started volunteering every Sunday as a second-grade classroom assistant at my temple's religious school. Two years later, my temple hired me to be a special needs shadow, and I spent two years paired with an autistic boy named Jason. Jason presents stereotypical characteristics of autism; he has trouble transitioning, displays unusual interest in certain areas, and prefers exploring his own mind over trying to communicate with others. When we met, Jason showed little interest in me. I doubted we would ever connect. But then he pulled the first of many toy cars out of his backpack. I started bringing a Matchbox car to every class, engaging Jason by incorporating it into our lessons, and we grew closer. I watched the boy who isolated himself because he could not communicate change. Three years later, I watched Jason proudly deliver his Bar Mitzvah speech in front of a congregation of friends and family.

The summer before I left for college, I assisted my temple's summer camp director in pioneering the temple's first special-needs inclusive summer camp program. My role as a shadow expanded at the summer camp, where I wrote behavior assessment and intervention plans for children with special needs and provided extra assistance to counselors who had children with special needs in their bunks. In college, I volunteered at a local community center where I painted and played baseball with children with special needs. During the summer following my sophomore year, I spent a month in the Khayelitsha township in Cape Town, South Africa, tutoring seventh graders who face systemic inequalities as a result of Apartheid in math and public health.

Teaching is not my future. I have a passion for becoming a lawyer. But maybe teaching could be my present. Last winter, I went bowling with Jason and attended one of his Special Olympics basketball games. Jason is 16 years old now, and both of us have moved on since being paired together six years ago. We still text back and forth, but I am not sure how much longer we will find time to see each other. However, I do know that I am an important part of his life and that we will remember each other forever. I want to form similar relationships and have a similar influence on other kids while I still have the time and means to do so.

I like to believe that the things that are important to me now will always be important. But I know that my life will change. I will start a career. I will start a family. I will have responsibilities. Right now, I have the time and energy to devote to causes in which I believe. But the unfortunate reality is that if I don't serve now, I probably never will. A few rare people devote their adult lives to service, but far more adjust their focus toward other responsibilities. That is why important causes need young people to serve, before we have too many responsibilities to find the time.

I will spend the 2020-2021 school year serving with City Year, an AmeriCorps national service program that mobilizes young adults aged 18-25 as near-peers to support schools and students in growing core values and skills that holistically drive social-emotional growth, civic participation, and academic success. City Year taps the energy and idealism of young people to create more equitable access to education opportunities for students in systemically under-resourced schools. As a City Year AmeriCorps member, I will serve as a class-



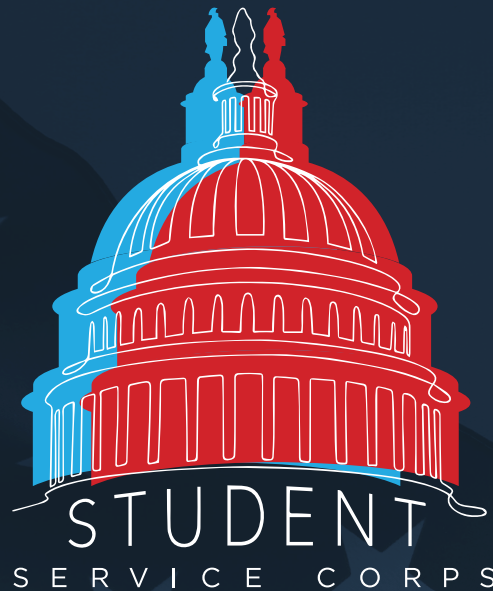
room assistant, tutor, and student success coach in a D.C. public school for 8-10 hours a day. I will work to support teachers, expand the number of caring adults in students' lives, develop close relationships with students, nurture students' holistic social, emotional and academic skills, and serve as a mentor and role model.

At City Year, we center our idealism around a collection of stories and quotations from many cultures that we call "Founding Stories." These stories illuminate the organizational values that guide us, set us on course, and remind us of the most fundamental motivations for our work. My favorite founding story is the Starfish Story, and it encapsulates the impact I hope to make during my service year.

The Starfish Story, adapted from "The Star Thrower" by Loren C. Eiseley, centers around a young girl walking along a beach upon which thousands of starfish had been washed up during a terrible storm. When the young girl came to each starfish, she picked it up and threw it back into the ocean. People watched the young girl with amusement, and after some time a man approached her and said, "little girl, why are you doing this? Look at this beach! You can't possibly help all these starfish. You can't begin to make a difference!" Upon hearing the man's words, the girl seemed crushed, suddenly deflated. But after a few moments, she bent down, picked up another starfish, and hurled it as far as she could into the ocean. Then she looked up at the man and replied, "well, I made a difference to that one!" The old man looked at the girl inquisitively and thought about what she had done and said. Inspired, he joined the little girl in throwing starfish back into the sea. Soon others joined, and all the starfish were helped.

As I embark on my year of service, I know I will not be able to alleviate systemic inequities in public education or close the achievement gap. I will not solve the education crisis in this country. But I will hold in my hands the power to change a life, a mind, or a circumstance every day, and I will create my own starfish story. At the end of the year, I will be writing another article to let you know about my experience. Before I embark though, I invite you to join me on the beach.

There are lots of starfish.



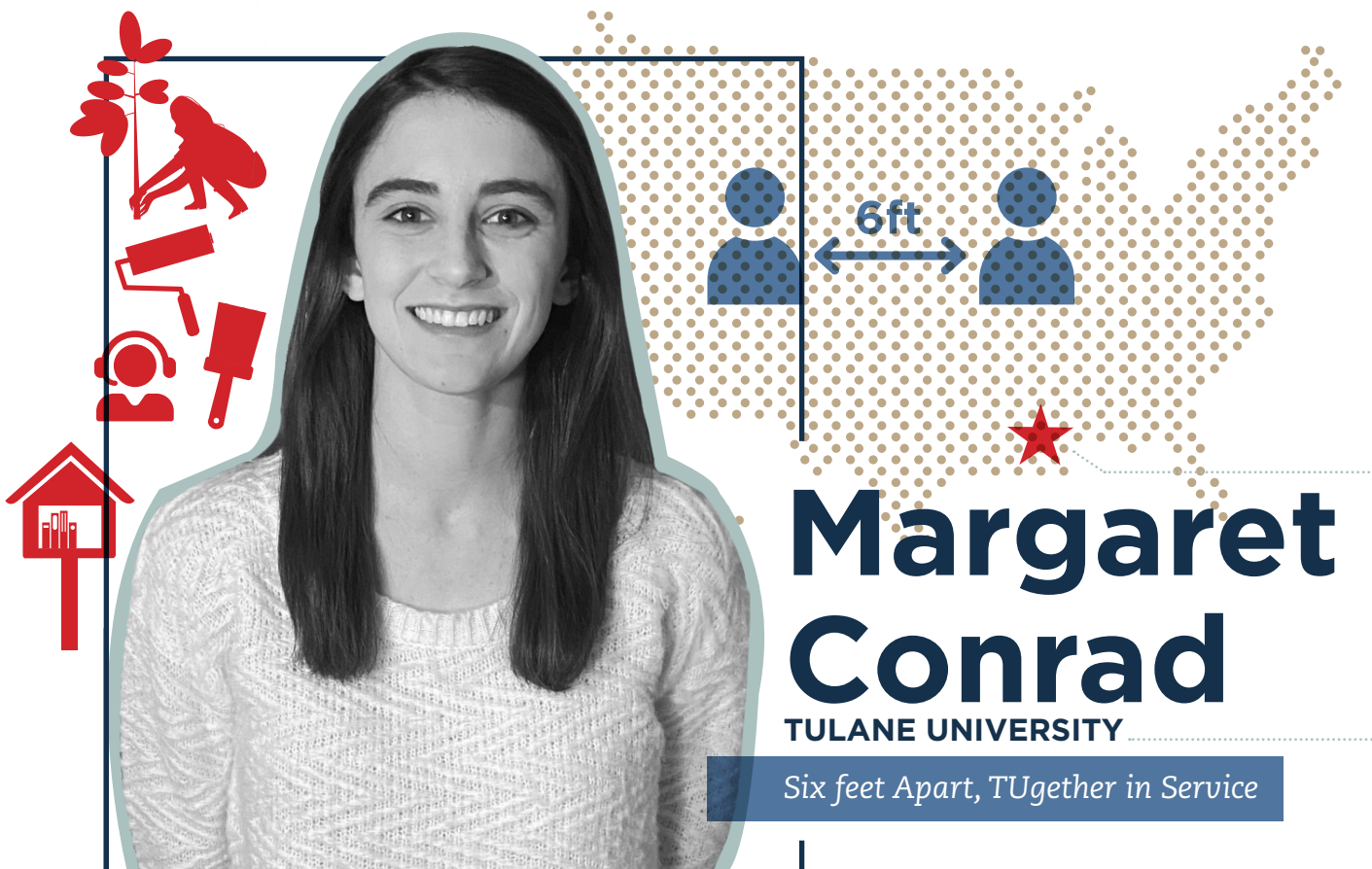
*To foster a sense of civic responsibility  
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Encourages secondary and post-secondary  
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# Margaret Conrad

TULANE UNIVERSITY

*Six feet Apart, TUgether in Service*

Taking shelter from Hurricane Katrina in Ochsner Hospital in New Orleans is among my earliest childhood memories. I was only 6 years old, but I remember watching the storm outside a large glass window, hearing that our home flooded, and later evacuating to Houston. Even as a young child, I was amazed at how many people from across the country lent their time, energy, and financial assistance to people from New Orleans in the aftermath of the storm. The school I attended while in Houston collected clothes for my brother and me, firefighters from Atlanta gutted our family home so it could be rebuilt, and two ladies in Michigan sent Christmas gifts to our local church. People came in the thousands to satisfy that human urge to help those in need. Growing up in a community of rebuilding and recovery instilled in me a desire to give back to those who supported my family and gave me an appreciation for the resilience of New Orleans. When deciding where to go to college, I chose Tulane University since I knew I didn't want to leave New Orleans.

As a new Tulane student, I found a way to show off my city to my classmates through Outreach Tulane.

Founded in 1990, Outreach Tulane is the university's largest and longest-running day of volunteer service, open to all students, staff, and faculty. It is a student-run event that sends around 1,000 volunteers to selected worksites around New Orleans. Key leadership positions on the Outreach Tulane planning committee include a Chair of Outreach Tulane, a Public Relations and Marketing team, a Logistics team, a Community Partners Coordinator, and a Project Coordinator. After two years of volunteer experience, I applied to be Outreach Tulane's Community Partners Coordinator, feeling I had a general understanding of the work of nonprofits in New Orleans and the local community's needs. As Community Partners Coordinator, it was my job to coordinate with nonprofits to find volunteer sites.

As I searched for Outreach Tulane projects, I aimed to provide students with various projects as diverse as the needs of New Orleans. At *New Orleans City Park*, volunteers cleared out invasive plants and helped with other gardening needs. Through *Network Volunteers*, students were sent to several local schools to help paint, clean, and get ready for the new school year. In true New

Continued on page 20







## Our motto became “six feet apart, TUgether in service.”

Orleans fashion, we sent a group to sort Mardi Gras beads at ARC of Greater New Orleans Recycling Center. Volunteers cataloged artwork with Ashe Cultural Arts Center and organized a library with Young Audiences Charter School. With Boys Hope Girls Hope of New Orleans, the workday started with Tulane students introducing themselves and talking about their college journey and ended with a thorough cleaning and gardening around the building. The goal of Outreach Tulane is two-fold: to perform a task and introduce Tulane students to a non-profit organization that they could continue to work with during their time in New Orleans. In the end, we had 24 sites for volunteers supporting environmental projects, schools, and humanitarian projects.

In April of 2020, I was asked to lead Outreach Tulane. At the time, the COVID-19 pandemic was peaking in intensity in the greater New Orleans region. Tulane students were quarantined at home and taking classes online. It was difficult enough to plan a week ahead, let alone for a major event that was months away at a university that might not be open. Our team was up to the challenge. We began by discussing how we would meet the unique challenge of balancing health and safety for a massive and much-needed volunteer event during the COVID-19 pandemic. There was also the added pressure of celebrating the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Outreach Tulane and paying tribute to the 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Hurricane Katrina. We came up with three nearly impossible goals:

- Educate new freshmen about New Orleans and Hurricane Katrina;
- Provide service to the community and, most importantly;
- Maintain health and safety standards for both the New Orleans community and our volunteers.

Our motto became “six feet apart, TUgether in service.”

We met our first goal by presenting virtually at New Student Orientation about the variety of service opportunities at Tulane and discussing Hurricane Katrina’s

lasting impact on New Orleans. We concluded our presentation by asking every student to write a friendly letter to a nursing home resident that the Tulane club, *Bridging Generations*, would later deliver. While this project was small, it achieved our educational goal and reached every freshman, encouraging them to think empathetically about New Orleans residents in nursing homes. We met our second goal on the day of Outreach Tulane. We decided to host a series of smaller projects conducted entirely on campus, such as building small neighborhood libraries, making dog toys out of old t-shirts, and cleaning storm drains cluttered with oak tree leaves and debris. We also had remote virtual projects, including transcribing museum documents, participating in citizen science projects, and conducting calls for *Step-Up Louisiana*. As for our health-and-safety goal, we kept volunteers entirely outdoors on campus in groups smaller than 50 people with ample room to be 6 feet apart. We checked and double-checked our university guidelines to ensure we provided the recommended protective measures, including hand sanitizer, masks, and accurate rosters.

The event has entirely changed in the two years I have served on the Outreach Tulane planning committee. As the world adapts to the challenges of COVID-19, the way we volunteer and support each other must also change. However, the one thing that has not changed is the altruism that encouraged volunteerism after Hurricane Katrina and encourages us to continue our tradition of volunteering.

My work on Outreach Tulane has come during my pursuit of an undergraduate degree in Ecology and Evolutionary Biology on the pre-med track. My Tulane education prepared me well for the Medical College Admission Test (MCAT), and I have been able to conduct research and gain clinical experience. However, the volunteerism incorporated into my college curriculum has done more to prepare me for a medical career than any lecture or lab experience. I have learned to lead, improved my organizational skills, and boosted my confidence. Most importantly, volunteering has taught me about the needs of New Orleans and given me an appreciation for the incredible people who work to make this city a better place. Outreach Tulane provided a perfect opportunity to get to know the people I intend to serve as a physician. I encourage any student interested in community service to view challenges, including the current pandemic, as an opportunity to adapt and lead volunteers in a new way.



# DELTA SCHOLARS

## CULTIVATING CHANGE-MAKERS IN MISSISSIPPI

The Delta Scholars Program is a two-part academic and community engagement program for talented and socially conscious college students interested in moving Mississippi and the Delta region towards a brighter, more just tomorrow. Delta Scholars are selected for their academic achievements and commitment to public service to participate in a ten-day Summer Institute in Mississippi followed by a five-day trip to Boston and Harvard University in the fall. Both experiences form a cohort of young leaders thinking critically about systemic injustices in the Mississippi Delta, with each Scholar developing a project that will produce positive social change in their communities. This is a nationally competitive program aimed at sophomores and above from Mississippi or simply committed to social issues there. Open to all majors, there will be special research opportunities for students interested in public health.

For more information, visit [honors.msstate.edu](http://honors.msstate.edu) or contact Dr. Christopher Snyder, Dean of the Shackouls Honors College, at 662.325.2522 or [csnyder@honors.msstate.edu](mailto:csnyder@honors.msstate.edu).

## PARTNERS

The Delta Scholars Program is a collaborative effort between the Shackouls Honors College at Mississippi State University, University of Mississippi's Center for Population Studies, the Delta Directions Consortium, the Harvard School of Public Health, the Harvard Law School, and the Phillips Brooks House Center for Public Service and Engaged Scholarship at Harvard College.

## SUMMER INSTITUTE

The Summer Institute is a ten-day immersion program during which each student works to identify an issue of inequality or injustice that they are interested in. Each student will develop a proposal for a project that will promote dialogue and change around that issue in their own communities or the state of Mississippi broadly.

Students spend the first portion of the program at the Shackouls Honors College at Mississippi State University where they engage with faculty and guest lecturers from a range of disciplines to learn about issues currently challenging the people and the economy of Mississippi, including food insecurity, public health, education, and more. Before concluding the summer program, students take an Innovation Tour of the Delta, where they have the chance to meet and learn from researchers, non-profit organizations, and community members who have worked to tackle difficult issues in their community through bold new approaches and community-led efforts. Students have the opportunity to present their own project proposals at the annual Delta Regional Forum in Clarksdale, MS.

## HARVARD WEEK

Following the Summer Institute, the Delta Scholars reconnect in the fall for five days at Harvard University in Cambridge, MA. This trip provides an opportunity for students to share updates on their projects, receive continuing feedback, reflect on lessons learned from the program, and discuss how those lessons might be applied to solving other problems in or outside of Mississippi. The Scholars also engage with Harvard students and faculty working on Mississippi issues, including Harvard Law students in the Mississippi Delta Project. The goal of this intellectual exchange is to provide both sides with fresh perspectives, promote dialogue that can push their work forward, and foster networks of young leaders that might collaborate in the future.



Mimi Shufelt is an undergraduate student at the University of Mississippi, where she majors in English with a minor in philosophy and ethics. Mimi currently serves as a writing tutor at the University of Mississippi and previously served as the Ethical Policy Debate Team Captain on the university's debate team, which won the 2019 Mid-Atlantic competition.

Read her interview with U.S. Sen. Roger Wicker (R-MS) on the Cultivating Opportunity and Response to the Pandemic through Service Act (CORPS Act), which calls for strengthening and expanding AmeriCorps and Senior Corps to help our nation recover from COVID-19.

**Mimi Shufelt: Can you provide a short overview of the most impactful parts of this bill (CORPS Act)?**

*Sen. Wicker:* Let's start with the proposition that AmeriCorps is already a highly successful program that has enabled many young people, especially young people, to provide national service throughout the country for years. We want to expand AmeriCorps to help meet the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic as communi-

ties throughout the country work to recover from the impact over the next few years. We want to mandate that work be done in the most cost-effective way by expanding AmeriCorps. Of course, AmeriCorps volunteers are paid a modest allowance, but this is the most cost-efficient and effective way to get the work done. The CORPS Act provides funds to expand AmeriCorps to help meet community needs. This [CORPS Act] is a very bipartisan effort. You would be surprised by how much bipartisanship still exists in the U.S. Senate, even now as a presidential election approaches.

**Mimi Shufelt: That [bipartisanship] was one of the most interesting components of the CORPS Act. It seems it really does reach across party lines.**

*Sen. Wicker:* I want to give a shout-out to U.S. Sen. Chris Coons, who has a real knack for working with people. He is well known in the Republican Cloakroom as a Democrat who reaches across the aisle to work with Republicans on legislation. I like to think that I am seen that way by my Democrat colleagues as one who reaches across the aisle to get things done.



**Mimi Shufelt:** Congress has provided states with trillions of dollars in COVID-19 relief efforts. How can states use the funds allocated in the CORPS Act, once it passes, differently from the funds already dispersed through the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES Act)?

*Sen. Wicker:* The keyword you mention is “trillions,” which would have been unthinkable for us at the first of the year. But even the fiscal hawks in the administration realized what shutting down the economy would do, and they said don’t be afraid of the ‘t’ word. A relatively small amount of those funds went to the states. States were given flexibility, and I would keep that flexibility for the states in spending COVID-19 funds. For example, Mississippi wants to build out broadband – it is the rural electrification project of our time. Just like those who came before, who realized we could not rely solely on the private sector to make electricity available in rural areas, we realize you can’t get broadband internet out to everyone on a commercial basis. Government has to intervene. The CORPS Act would supplement the funds being used to do things that need to be done in our communities. It involves volunteers helping neighbors – doing things that need to be done in an efficient way.

**Mimi Shufelt:** With the CORPS Act, you don’t have to reinvent the wheel?

*Sen. Wicker:* It is an expansion of a popular, successful program. The AmeriCorps ‘volunteers’ are paid modestly to be part of something worthwhile and bigger than themselves.

**Mimi Shufelt:** Why do you believe it is important for young people entering the workforce to be exposed to some form of public service?

*Sen. Wicker:* It is in the great American tradition. Nobody does it better than America. Don’t take my word for it – look at what Alexis de Tocqueville, the famous French sociologist who came to America in the 1800s, said about our country. He marveled at what Americans did as volunteers – not what they were required to do but what they volunteered to do for their fellow citizens. And Americans who serve others have always benefited from and taken pride in that service – knowing they are doing something for the good of mankind, for God, if you will.



TOP: Mimi Shufelt interviewing U.S. Sen. Wicker



**W**hat sets Portland State University (PSU)'s Student Community Engagement Center (SCEC) apart from similar institutions is our dedication to critical service-learning principles, defined by Dr. Tania D. Mitchell, an internationally recognized scholar in service-learning and community engagement. Our center explicitly focuses on social justice issues and centering community needs. We build our programming: (1) to develop authentic relationships, (2) to work to redistribute power, and (3) to guide ourselves with an orientation toward social change (2008). In this article, I paint a picture of how our center embodies these principles and highlight how we have changed our programming in response to a pandemic that has reshaped the world as we know it. I am proud to say that despite the significant changes that we have had to make this past year, our center has remained dedicated to these principles and has come to embody them further during this time.

#### **DEVELOPING AUTHENTIC RELATIONSHIPS**

The goal of any service-learning program is to help meet a community's needs. However, a student

engagement center located within a university can easily become disconnected from its community. As a result, well-meaning groups frequently enter a community offering services that are, at best, not helpful, and at worst, actively harmful, which is why our SCEC prioritizes developing authentic relationships. Developing authentic relationships with a community partner means building an understanding of the community and one's positionality inside of it. Dictionary.com defines positionality as "the social and political context that creates your identity." It describes "how your identity influences and potentially biases, your understanding of and outlook on the world." Developing authentic relationships means understanding how one is similar and different from the community they serve (Mitchell 2008).

Our Student Leaders for Service program exemplifies how that understanding is built. In this program, students pair with one community partner organization for the entire year. Students participate in a weekly class where they discuss their service experience, analyze their positionality, and learn about issues of



justice at play. In our most recent class, we discussed institutions of power and how they impact the communities we serve. I posed the question, “Which of these institutions most impact your community partner?” In particular, one student critiqued the question and explained that selecting just one was nearly impossible for her work serving students in an under-resourced area. “I see how the legal system, the economic system, and the education system all play a huge factor in their lives.” That type of critical thinking is imperative to developing an authentic relationship with a particular community.



At SCEC, our commitment to authentic relationships goes beyond our connections to our community partners. It extends to the community we build inside our center as well. Our students come from a wide variety of backgrounds. Some hold immense privilege, while others have been harmed by the institutions of power we discuss. As facilitators of service-learning, our staff is faced with the question, “How can we create a space where an educational dialogue can take place without burdening the students directly impacted by issues of justice to be educators of their peers?” While this is an ongoing question for us, the way we try and address it is to speak to the different levels of power and privilege that exist in our center’s community and PSU in general. We strive to get to know each other as individuals, and we adapt our programming to meet our students’ needs. In every sense, we work to grow our understanding of our community and let the community lead our work.

## REDISTRIBUTING POWER

Often, the students’ needs are at the center of a service-learning experience, giving them the power to

determine how they will serve a community partner. Furthermore, students often enter community spaces unaware of the difference in the power their position of privilege creates (Mitchell 2008). In contrast, SCEC places our community partners’ needs and voices at the center of everything we do. We ask our students to humbly enter community spaces, allow their community partners to lead, and look to both serve and learn. This accords with many of the aspects of the critical service-learning principles of redistributing power. And our center strives to redistribute power in other ways.

There are many barriers to service-learning that exist and often act as a way to exclude students not granted privilege by U.S. society (e.g., most folks not in the white middle-and-upper classes or students of “non-traditional” college-age). I am proud to say that our center strives to lower and eliminate those barriers to the best of our ability. For example, we prioritize providing transportation to volunteers. Transportation represents just one of many often-overlooked hurdles to service-learning experiences. If transportation falls on the student, students with a car will have an advantage compared to students who depend on public transportation, as the latter have to deal with added costs and time commitments.

Similarly, students who need to work to support themselves often have to choose between the service-learning experience or their job. We try to lower this barrier to entry by offering scholarships to participate in our year-long Student Leaders for Service program. When we eliminate those barriers to entry, a wider variety of students participate. I have the privilege to work with students that come from a wide variety of backgrounds. Some are BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and people of color); some are parents; some are first-generation college students; some are immigrants. The involvement of these students is a redistribution of power from the average service-learning participant. Students can serve communities they belong to, lessening the power differential of service-learning. It also gives these students the privileges of service-learning, like strengthening their resume and providing valuable work experience.

## A SOCIAL CHANGE MINDSET

A key element to a social change mindset is fostering an understanding that the service we engage in opposes the systems of oppression and institutions of power that make our service necessary (Mitchell 2008). We

aim to ensure our students understand that their work would not be required if those forces were dismantled. The reflection we ask our students to undertake is essential in creating a social change mindset. We name the forces creating the need our community partners serve, and we challenge our students to imagine a world where that need does not exist. For example, our MAPs (Mentor: Alder and Portland State) mentorship program with Alder Elementary School would not be required if there were equity in our education system.

Following our recent discussion of institutions of power in our Student Leaders for Service class, we provided a list of measures that were up for a vote in our upcoming election. We asked our students to analyze the possible impact of these measures from their community partners' perspective. This exercise served as an example that change is possible. The forces we are working against are not undefeatable. With each service opportunity, we ask the question, "How could this contribute to social change?" We hope for that mindset to become ingrained in our students as they graduate and enter new communities. We hope their experiences with SCEC will combine all three of the principles of critical service-learning and forever shape how they enter, engage, and work in the communities around them. We hope that they serve ethically and mindfully and believe that they can join others to bring about genuine change.

### THE IMPACT OF COVID-19

With the onset of COVID-19, much of SCEC's programming has faced drastic changes. Both one-time service opportunities and days of service have been canceled or moved online, and our Alternative Spring Break program has been postponed for the foreseeable future. At the same time, many of our community partners have had to learn how to operate virtually, or even with decreased funding, while their community's needs soar. To adapt, we have had to determine what services are necessary for this new reality. We have had to rethink how to continue our goal of redistributing power while weathering economic pressures (like losing corporate partnership funding for our transportation cost). Many of our students also returned home to save money while our university operates remotely. During this time, the importance of developing and maintaining authentic relationships has only heightened, which is why we continue to center our community partners' needs while also prioritizing keeping barriers to access low. While virtual opportunities reduce barriers to en-

try, they complicate the process of building authentic relationships with community partners. This leaves us with the question of how virtual service opportunities can adequately contribute to social change—a question we continue to work to address as we grow and adjust to this new environment.

While all of our programs have substantially changed, our MAPs mentorship program was hit the hardest. With the onset of virtual learning, our ability to offer mentorship to Alder Elementary School in the way we had in the past became impossible. Our pivot in programming is emblematic of changes our center has made as a whole. The leader of this pivot is Doug Van Anda, a senior psychology major, who has served Portland's community for years and works as our Mentorship & Service Program Assistant. As a result, he is keenly aware of the needs of our community and campus. This awareness led to the creation of our MAPs (Mentor and Peer Support) 2.0 program. This program continues our center's commitment to the Alder community but adds two other prongs to address some of the needs on our campus that have grown due to the pandemic. First, we partnered with the Transfer and Returning Student Resource Center to provide mentorship to students who just joined the PSU community. We hope to help guide them in navigating our new virtual environment while also avoiding the risk of social isolation. Second, we partnered with PSU's new student shelter, which provides overnight housing for our peers experiencing houselessness.

Our new programming represents our **authentic relationship** with our partners. There are virtual opportunities, like making outreach phone calls for Alder Elementary School and providing virtual mentorship to transfer students. And there are also physically-distanced but in-person opportunities like making food deliveries in the Alder community and staffing our student shelter. This combination allows us to meet our community partners' needs while also keeping barriers to entry low, thus **redistributing power**. While coronavirus has disrupted our usual ways of doing things, it has encouraged our center to innovate. Our virtual one-time service projects can be implemented more frequently and with greater variety. We have card-making nights for Meals on Wheels, letter-writing campaigns for Alder teachers, and discussion panels focused on education around justice issues. And there is still more room to grow! This pandemic has highlighted the systems of oppression that our center works to challenge.



As our **mindset toward social change** tells us, however, not only can we join forces with communities to provide relief, but we can also fight the systemic forces that made this pandemic so devastating in the first place.

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**Ayesha Ahsan**



**Anusha Natarajan**



**Trey Leveque**

ARIZONA STATE UNIVERSITY

*Building a Culture of Civic Engagement at Arizona State University*

“Arizona State University (ASU) is a comprehensive public research university, measured not by whom it excludes, but by whom it includes and how they succeed; advancing research and discovery of public value; and assuming fundamental responsibility for the economic, social, cultural and overall health of the communities it serves.”

Adopted in 2014, ASU’s charter highlights the institution’s commitment to positive social change. The student-led team at ASU’s Pastor Center for Politics and Public Service aims to model that commitment through collaborative efforts with institutions across the university to create a culture of widespread civic engagement among the student body. This team, which is also a chapter of the Andrew Goodman Foundation, works in partnership with student organizations and administration to facilitate the creation of an informed and engaged student population.

With approximately 75,000 students across ASU’s four campuses, there are many obstacles in finding ways to engage and educate every student. The ASU Andrew

Goodman Foundation team has identified five main institutional partners to strengthen the impact of the team’s initiatives while also institutionalizing voter engagement practices: the ASU Civic Engagement Coalition, Associated Students of Arizona State University, Changemaker Central, Sun Devil Athletics, and University Housing.

#### **ARIZONA STATE UNIVERSITY CIVIC ENGAGEMENT COALITION**

The ASU Civic Engagement Coalition was founded in 2018, several months before the midterm elections. As a result of the large student body, there are dozens of student organizations across the university’s four campuses committed to increase civic engagement, whether it be through civil dialogue, service, voter mobilization, or issue-based advocacy. Many of these organizations have similar goals, yet, due to the university’s sheer size, identifying others with common interests is difficult. The lack of collaboration between the student organizations on campus inspired the creation of the Civic Engagement Coalition, a student-led effort housed in the Pastor Center with the main goal



of creating a unified action plan to increase student engagement.

The three main stakeholders of the Civic Engagement Coalition are the Andrew Goodman Foundation team at the Pastor Center, Associated Students of Arizona State University, and Changemaker Central. These three organizations have worked to build membership in the coalition, leading to collaborations with March For Our Lives at ASU, NextGen Arizona, and the ASU Cultural Coalitions. The coalition meets monthly to discuss the initiatives and events that each of its members has planned with an emphasis on how the member organizations can best collaborate and support one another.

Through the collaborative efforts of the Civic Engagement Coalition, student organizations have been given the support they need to increase their impact. During the fall 2020 semester, the coalition launched the #SunDevilsVote campaign with a special event featuring comedian Hasan Minhaj, which engaged approximately 1,300 students. The #SunDevilsVote campaign is being used across all four campuses and by each of the coalition's member organizations to promote voter participation under a unified brand, inherently strengthening our efforts.

## **ASSOCIATED STUDENTS OF ARIZONA STATE UNIVERSITY**

Associated Students of Arizona State University (ASASU) is made up of the four Undergraduate Student Governments at the Downtown Phoenix campus, Polytechnic campus, Tempe campus, and West campus, along with the Graduate and Professional Student Association. ASASU provides a number of student-run services and advocates for student initiatives, including student wellness, campus safety, community outreach, civic engagement, and ASU pride and traditions. ASASU also facilitates the distribution of funding from the student activity fee to clubs and organizations across ASU. ASASU voices students' concerns and interests at the university, local, state, and national levels and provides students with experience and training through active political participation.

ASASU continued our annual commitment to voter registration and hosted an engaging day for the student body for National Voter Registration Day 2020. ASASU presided over a virtual tabling event where nearly all major political clubs and organiza-

tions also engaged students. The event began with Maricopa County Recorder, Chief Elections Officer for Maricopa County, Adrian Fontes, giving a speech on the importance of the youth vote. The Mayor of Tempe, Corey Woods, and the Arizona Secretary of State, Katie Hobbs, also spoke at the event. Students had the chance to learn from various political organizations and community groups about how to get involved outside of simply voting.

Throughout the year, ASASU also hosts events revolving around the idea of improving an open dialogue with one another and elected representatives. For example, in spring 2020, the USG-T Civic Engagement Director hosted a "Presidential Preference Roundtable" with the Maricopa County Recorder to discuss the Presidential Preference Election (PPE). Recorder Fontes gave a presentation about the PPE and gave updates on what the Maricopa County Recorder's office is planning to do over the next few years. In the fall 2020 semester, the USG-T Civic Engagement Director continued these conversations to engage the broader student body in the conversation of voting.



## **CHANGEMAKER CENTRAL**

Changemaker Central is a nonprofit organization centered in ASU that brings together like-minded students to further social change. The organization is divided into four areas of focus: service, sustainability, entrepreneurship and innovation, and civic engagement. Changemaker Central brings our ASU community together by offering grants to fund project ideas of students and organizations and hold events that focus on the four pillars.

The Civic Engagement Committee at Changemaker Central has expanded its efforts from voting to a focus on dialogues, workshops on civic engagement beyond

electoral politics, and uplifting diverse voices. This year, the committee has held civil dialogues about MLK's Dream, a conversation about the importance and the history behind the U.S. Constitution, and a panel and workshop on the importance of civic engagement and voting in the Hispanic and Latinx community.

Changemaker Central's Civic Engagement Committee also provides support and resources for students and community members who are curious to know more about the election process, information about the ballot, and where to vote.

The goal of the Civic Engagement Committee is to expand the breadth and depth of civic engagement to not only focus on voting and elections but also to hold discussions and raise awareness about other issues and topics of interest in our community such as human rights, gender equality, and climate change. The committee's future efforts in this area are aimed at expanding civic engagement efforts across campus by working with different civic and political groups to engage the student body to be active and passionate about various issues that affect the community.

### **SUN DEVIL ATHLETICS**

ASU Athletics has long been a major part of the university. To leverage the reach of Sun Devil Athletics while also providing a platform to empower ASU athletes to speak about issues that they are passionate about, the Andrew Goodman Foundation ASU team started a partnership with Sun Devil Athletics. Spearheaded by an ASU athlete on the Andrew Goodman Foundation ASU team, the main goal of this partnership is to register, educate, and mobilize student-athlete voters through a series of workshops and programs. These programs include meetings with past and current legislators, such as former U.S. Rep. Matt Salmon, to discuss the importance of involvement in public policy and a workshop to explore political ideologies. Through these efforts, the voter registration rate among student-athletes rose from 10 percent to approximately 75 percent as of early October 2020. Not only is this population prepared to participate in electoral politics, but they are now also able to set an example for other students and work to enact positive social change toward issues that they are passionate about.

### **UNIVERSITY HOUSING**

Campus housing is the hub for most of the social activity that occurs at ASU. Thousands of students live

in the on-campus dorms and apartments across the four campuses. The Community Assistants (CAs) at ASU, typically known as Residential Assistants at other universities, are responsible for ensuring student safety, supporting their residents, and building a sense of community. Due to their frequent interaction with the student body, our team worked to build a partnership with ASU Housing to incorporate civic engagement efforts into the work that CAs were already doing.

During the summer of 2019, the Andrew Goodman Foundation ASU team created a voter registration training that was presented to all of the CAs in ASU's College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, one of ASU's largest colleges. The training program proved to be successful and was implemented once again this past summer in the form of a Canvas module. Every CA at ASU, across all four campuses, was required to complete this Canvas module as a part of their general training, ensuring that each of them is qualified to assist students in registering to vote.

### **IMPACT**

According to ASU's campus report from the National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement from Tufts University, the university's voter turnout rate between the 2014 and 2018 midterm elections rose from 19 percent to 41.5 percent. This was a dramatic increase, especially considering the low turnout rates that midterm elections generally have. Between 2012 and 2016, voter turnout rose from 47.8 percent to 58.7 percent, which is also a substantial increase. Since July 2020, over 1,000 people have used ASU's TurboVote, our primary voter registration tool, and 600 of those individuals have received registration assistance. The student-led efforts across the four campuses were undoubtedly the reason for this increase, and we are confident that ASU's voter turnout numbers will only continue to grow.

ASU is a robust and diverse university with students from all walks of life. These individuals are fundamental to ASU's well-being and the surrounding community, and it is imperative that they feel empowered to express their beliefs and opinions. Voting is the first step to building an engaged campus and creating a culture of civic engagement that transcends voting. Despite the obstacles we have and will continue to face, we are optimistic about ASU's future as a champion of civic engagement.





### KNOW THE ELECTIONS TIMELINE

**General Election**

- **August 2, 2020**  
First day to request a one-time ballot-by-mail for the General Election only
- **October 5, 2020**  
Voter Registration Deadline
- **October 7, 2020**  
First day for counties to mail ballots to voters (and first day of in-person early voting)
- **October 23, 2020**  
Last day to request a ballot-by-mail or sign up for PEVL
- **October 27, 2020**  
Recommended deadline to mail back your ballot
- **November 3, 2020**  
Election Day - All ballots must be received by 7:00 p.m.



### KNOW YOUR VOTER OPTIONS

**Vote early in person**

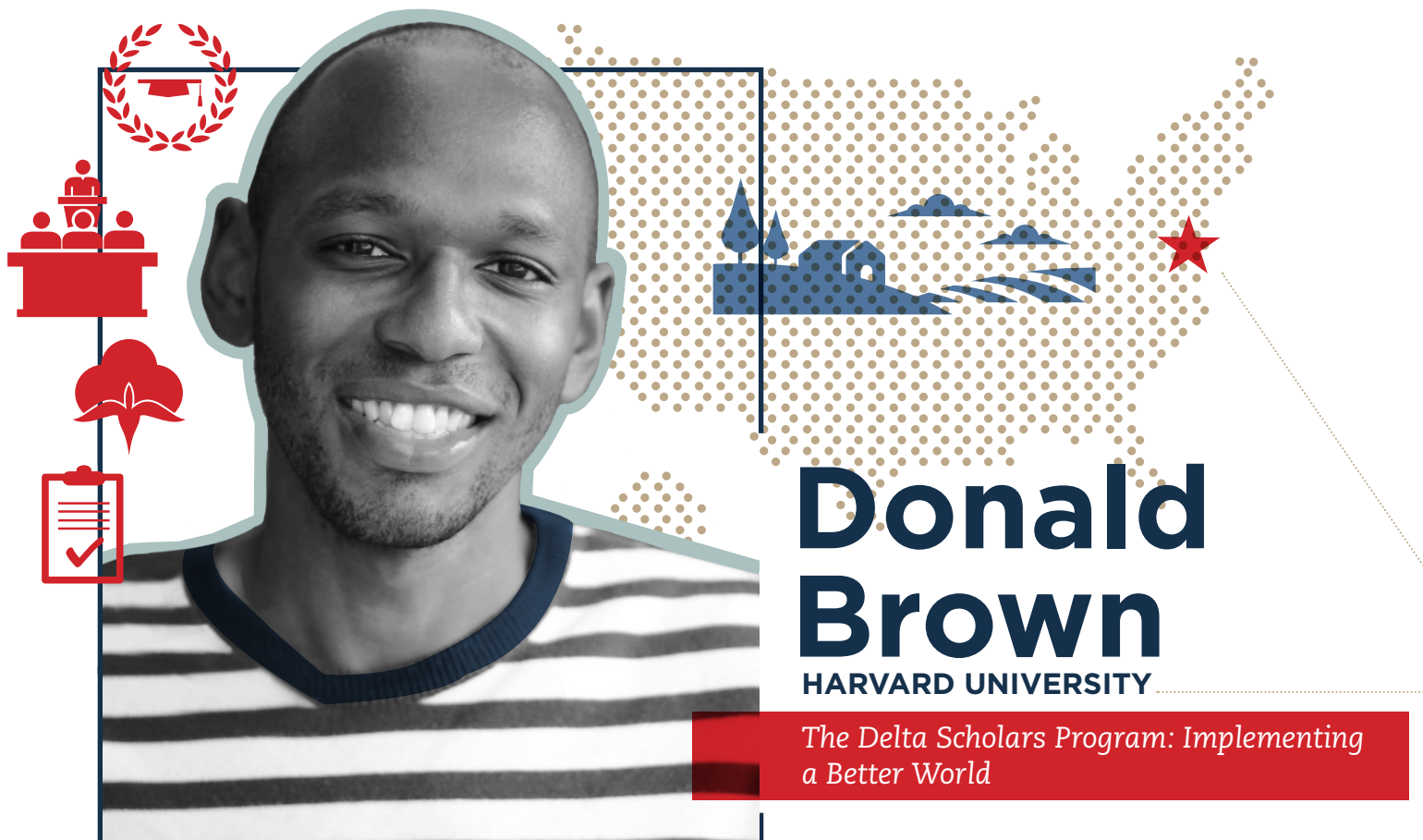
Mail back or drop off an early ballot. To sign up for the Permanent Early Voting List or request a one-time ballot-by-mail, visit [azsos.gov/votebymail](https://azsos.gov/votebymail).

**Vote in person on Election Day**

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For more trusted voter information  
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TOP LEFT: Roundtable with County Recorder. BOTTOM LEFT: Town Hall with County Recorder's Office. RIGHT: ASU 2020 USG-Tempe NVRD Event with Tempe Mayor Corey Woods and Arizona Secretary of State Katie Hobbs.



In 1998 Maya Angelou directed her only film: *Down in the Delta*. It tells the story of a family separated by the Great Migration. Some relatives moved to Chicago, while others stayed in what is infamously recognized as the poorest, and Blackest, region in the United States: the Mississippi Delta.

The star-studded cast consisting of Alfre Woodard, Esther Rolle, Loretta Devine, and Wesley Snipes, among others, tells the story of the family now living in Chicago. They move back down to the Delta for a summer to make some extra money and rediscover their roots. Though reluctant at first, Loretta Sinclair (played by Alfre Woodard) and her children eventually find purpose afresh in the rural country life of their ancestors.

It is a sentimental storyline, to be sure, but it hits upon a central theme of 20th century American history. Nicholas Lemann's title to his *New York Times* best-selling history puts it simply: *The Promised Land: The Great Black Migration and How It Changed America* (1991). It surely changed the dynamics of both the North and Midwest. However, what often goes unnoticed is how it also fundamentally changed the American South.

Mississippi, which gained its statehood in 1817, quickly became the wealthiest state in the Union by the beginning of the Civil War, primarily due to slaves who picked cotton from sunup to sundown without compensation. Even after the Civil War – and following the short-lived attempt of Reconstruction – cotton remained the primary source of wealth for Mississippi. The state that had dreams of accruing the wealth of the past and maintaining its racial hierarchies, once again, turned to what they knew best for answers: the plantation economy.

In what Douglas Blackmon called *Slavery by Another Name: The Re-Enslavement of Black Americans from the Civil War to World War II* (1998), Jim Crow-era sharecropping reproduced the same antebellum conditions. The Delta, more than any other place in Mississippi, was ripe for potential. The Yazoo-Mississippi Delta, which sits in the northwest corner of the state, between the Mississippi and Yazoo Rivers, consists of some of the richest land in not just the country, but the world.

Approximately 200 miles long and 87 miles wide, the more than 4,000,000 acres of alluvial floodplain was



a hotbed for cotton. As Neil McMillen wrote in *Dark Journey: Black Mississippians in the Age of Jim Crow* (1989), “the state has been as regards to both soil and people one of the blackest realms of the great southern black belt. In 1890, when nearly 60 percent (743,000) of Mississippi’s 1,300,000 people were black, the state was home to nearly one in ten of all Afro-Americans.” The Delta, in particular, was largely responsible for the state’s concentration of black soil, and people: Issaquena County, 94.1 percent Black, and Tunica County, 90.6 percent Black, were the first and third-Blackest counties in the country, and those people who worked that black soil produced billions upon billions of dollars of wealth for the planter-elite, and the country.

My grandfather was one of those Black workers, or sharecroppers, who picked cotton on a Delta plantation in the generations after the Civil War in the small town of Lexington, Mississippi. He escaped the plantation as a teen and moved to Vicksburg, Mississippi, which lies at the southernmost tip of the Delta. I grew up in Vicksburg two generations after him, hearing stories of his past. I also grew up with the expectation that I would have to leave that city, and region, if I wanted to become successful.

The Delta Scholars Program directly addresses this region’s complex history, and how that impacts the current condition of the region that looms large in the American imagination, but sits at the periphery of its priorities for economic development. The Delta Scholars Program is a collaborative effort between Mississippi State University’s (MSU) Shackouls Honors College, the University of Mississippi’s Center for Population Studies, and the Delta Directions Consortium. It also includes MSU’s Social Science Research Center, Harvard Law School, and the Phillips Brooks House Center for Public Service and Engaged Scholarship at Harvard College.

In years past, MSU has hosted a group of approximately 12 students to partake in the immersion program, which focuses on issues of systemic injustice and community well-being impacting the Mississippi Delta. During the Delta Scholars Summer Institute, students work to identify an inequality or injustice-related issue of interest. The students will develop project proposals for their selected topics to promote dialogue and change in their respective communities or the state of Mississippi at large.

While students are determining their topics of interest, they listen to various specialists who provide them with both breadth and depth about challenges currently impacting the people and economy of Mississippi, including issues of food insecurity, public health, and education. Through skills-based workshops, students will develop planning and advocacy skills to help them in developing their independent projects.

After a week at MSU, the students take a two-day trip to the Mississippi Delta and learn from researchers, nonprofit organization representatives, and community members who have worked to address difficult issues through community-led efforts. On the final day of the program, students attend the Delta Regional Forum in Clarksdale, Mississippi, and present their own project proposals.



The program ends at Harvard University the following school year. In the fall or spring of their junior year, Delta Scholars attend a five-day leadership symposium at Harvard where they reconnect as a cohort, meet with their mentors, and tour Cambridge and Boston. Guided discussions among scholars and mentors function as a time to reflect on lessons learned from the program and promote policy-centered dialogue. Harvard professors and law students also address the scholars in both small discussion groups and lectures, and students have the chance to learn about graduate school, professional opportunities, and national scholarships such as the coveted Truman, Rhodes, and Marshall scholarships.

Due to COVID-19, we did this all on Zoom over the summer, and the trip to Harvard is still to be decided. I was one of the program coordinators and a bridge between Harvard, where I am currently a Ph.D. candidate, and MSU, where I graduated in 2014 as its second Rhodes Scholar. We had a stellar group of 12 students from eight universities: Columbia University; Harvard University; Jackson State University; Mississippi State University; University of Alabama; University of Mississippi; University of Southern Mississippi; and Texas A&M. Their projects ran the gamut of human experience: youth betterment programming, mass incarceration associate degree pilot programming, community gardens, guided art workshops, COVID-19 public health research, com-

puter literacy programming, peer mentoring programming, college readiness programming, and public school curriculum creation.

It was an amazing two weeks. Though we could not physically meet each other, through Zoom, we formed new friendships; discussed history and politics; and imagined a better world—a world that would make my grandfather proud. And not only did we imagine, but we did the hard work of *implementing* the programs and policies necessary to bring that world to fruition—a world in which future generations would not have to leave the Delta for hopes of greener pastures.





**True leadership** comes from uniting the community, and developing policy solutions based on our common ground interests.

The ASU Congressman Ed Pastor Center for Politics & Public Service helps students learn the skills for effective political engagement as exemplified by the legacy of Congressman Pastor.

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# Eric Jones

GEORGE MASON UNIVERSITY  
SCHOOL OF LAW

*Reflections from the Hill: Internship with U.S. Representative Sam Farr*

**A**s I was about to begin my third year of law school at George Mason University, a job posting for an internship in the office of U.S. Representative Sam Farr caught my attention. I decided to apply, as I was having a bit of an identity crisis about becoming a traditional lawyer. To my surprise, his office offered me the internship, an internship that would have a lasting impact on my career and teach me an important lesson about public service.

Shortly after I began my internship, I was tasked to draft a “letter.” Letters were Rep. Farr’s response to constituents’ concerns. Typically, when you call or write to your senator or representative, their office will log the comment or question. From there, the member’s staff will ensure that you receive a response that addresses your concern. Rep. Farr’s office focused on written responses to his constituents. His office called these “letters.”

The process for letter writing in Rep. Farr’s office was pretty simple. We would receive a topic or question from the legislative correspondent; then, we would work with the legislative staffer who covers that issue

to research and draft a response. Once the draft was approved, we would send the letter to everyone who contacted the office about that specific issue.

One of the first letters I worked on as an intern addressed a complicated mess of laws that would have the unfortunate side effect of costing some people a lot of money. Near the end of 2015, President Obama announced there would be no Cost-Of-Living Adjustment (COLA) for those who received Social Security benefits that year. Yet, the cost of certain parts of Medicare had increased substantially, requiring an increase in the monthly premium for Medicare Part B participants to help offset that cost. While neither issue on its own is ideal, combined, these issues caused a huge problem. Federal law prevents the monthly premium from being raised for Social Security beneficiaries—approximately 70 percent of those using Medicare Part B—during a year when there is no COLA. This meant that without a change to federal law or an increase in federal funding, around 30 percent of Medicare Part B participants would be responsible for paying for 100 percent of the increased cost. What would have been a few modest dollars increase for everyone instead became an



upwards of \$50 to \$60 monthly increase for one-third of Medicare Part B participants. This was an obvious problem, and those that were affected were incredibly upset.

I researched to figure out what was causing the problem and then spoke with Rep. Farr's healthcare staffer before drafting the letter. After briefly reporting what people were saying when they wrote in, she asked me what I planned to write. I told her something similar to what I wrote above about conflicting laws. After I finished my explanation, there was a pause, as if the staffer expected me to say more. Once she realized I did not have more to say, she said, "these people don't care about why they have this problem; they want to know what Sam is going to do to help them."

It became clear to me what I had done wrong. Rep. Farr's constituents were not writing to ask for an explanation about why they would have to pay more than others. They were writing to the congressman because they knew they would have to pay more than others and wanted their congressman to fix it. I was so in the weeds of figuring out why the problem existed that I forgot to ask the most basic and obvious question: *what can be done to solve it?*

And so, I changed my approach. I talked with the staffer about the different solutions to solving the issue. What was Rep. Farr's position on access to health care and, specifically, Medicare Part B? Were there already bills introduced to solve this problem? Could Rep. Farr use his position on the House Committee on Appropriations to do something? These were all things I had not thought about, but the answers to those questions completely changed the way I drafted the letter. Simply put, I told them what Rep. Farr was doing to help them.

It has now been over five years since I had that conversation, and I still think about it from time-to-time. It can be so easy to get caught up in the abstract discussion of politics or policy and forget the real-life consequences of the problem. Even though I no longer work in a congressional office, when I find I have lost sight of the bigger picture, I think back to my experience drafting that letter. It reminds me why I decided to pursue a career in public service: to do what I can to help people.

And in case you wondered, a bipartisan solution to the hike in premiums was signed into law a couple of months later.

## DRAFTED LETTER BY ERIC JONES

Thank you for contacting me about the 52 percent increase in Medicare Part B premiums for those who are not Social Security beneficiaries.

As you may know, a portion of the entire cost of the Medicare Part B program is required by law to be paid by the premiums of participants. Normally, the yearly increases in the cost are minimal, and all Medicare Part B participants are able to cover the new costs. However, when some of the Medicare Part B participants do not pay the increased premiums, the cost is passed onto the remainder.

We currently find ourselves in just this situation: roughly 70 percent of participants will not pay an increase in Medicare Part B premiums for 2016. Because there will be no Cost-Of-Living Adjustment for Social Security beneficiaries next year, the Social Security Act prevents an increase in their premiums for Medicare Part B. This means that the remaining 30 percent of participants have to cover the rising cost of the program. Instead of paying the originally estimated premium of \$120.70, the 30 percent will pay \$159.30 – even though 70 percent of participants are only paying \$104.90.

As you know, there is no proposed legislation that would keep the 2016 monthly premiums at \$104.90 for all Medicare Part B participants (H.R. 3696 and S. 2148). Unfortunately, Republicans have stalled advancement of these bills because they want to ensure payment of the remaining balance – the portion that the increase was originally supposed to cover – before the bill is passed.

Be assured, I support legislation that will allow for equal premiums for all Medicare Part B participants, and I would support a bill that addresses Republican concerns so long as funding is done in a fair way. A 52 percent increase in the cost of Medicare Part B premiums is unreasonable, and I will continue to work to address these excessive costs before they go into effect in 2016.

Thank you for contacting me about such an important issue. Please do not hesitate to contact me again with any other questions or comments.



# Yousef Abu-Salah

VANDERBILT UNIVERSITY

*In Darkness, there is Hope*

**M**y life has always been that of an outsider. An outsider as a child in my town deep in the fraying sand and dotting olive trees of Gaza. An outsider as a teenager in the swampy Mississippi Delta. Mama always told me that there were men who measure themselves by the shadows they cast. I came to understand what she meant as I grew up. As a child, I routinely witnessed murder, suicide, and torture in the streets of Gaza. As a teenager, intense racism and discrimination were familiar experiences as I navigated Durant, Mississippi. Growing up was cavernous, baptizing me with the blackened throat of a rifle and the singing remains of Islamophobic expletives.

Many around me yearned for an escape. Some resorted to drugs, others resorted to sex, and a few even committed suicide. Yet, technology became my way out. Through small broken computers in Gaza, I found a love for tinkering with hardware. Through the old Gameboys my dad would buy secondhand, I discovered my love for interactive media. These magic portals to other dimensions, and what seemed like limitless potential, became my entire world. And I progressively

became more and more detached from the harsh reality around me. However, no matter how much I tried to run away, I could never truly escape the evils of the world.

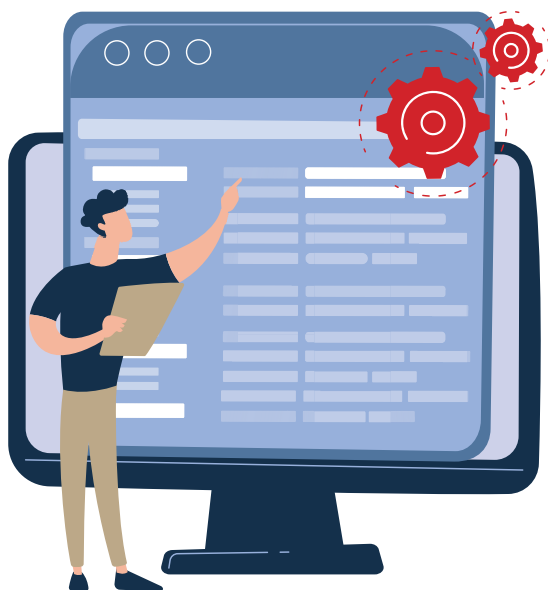
Mama always told me that someone can never escape their past. "Memory will always load the gun, and morning will find us scattered throughout the fields." Alongside the rest of my family, I suffer heavily from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). I think about my past every day, and it hurts. And, selfishly, perhaps, that is what led me to public service. I want to help people and create a world where no child must go through what I went through.

As a computer science and cognitive science major at Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tennessee, my goal is to prepare myself to make an impact through public service. Technology, I believe, is the most powerful tool for social change in the modern world. Through my lifelong love for innovation and technology, as well as my newfound passions in educational equity and social justice, I have spent the past few years executing a



myriad of public service tasks in the realms of software development and curriculum building for nonprofit organizations.

As a Web-Development and Product Intern with the Emmett Till Interpretive Center in the Mississippi Delta, I improved the website's design and functionality and aided in its fundraising campaign that amassed over \$150,000 toward the development of a national park dedicated to Emmett Till's story. It was an incredibly humbling experience to learn about the life and horrendous death of Emmett Till. The country's history is one rife with violence and injustice, and this is but one chapter in the perpetual Black struggle that I continue to learn about more. It is also a struggle that heavily mirrors the modern Palestinian experience—an experience characterized by a common dehumanization to justify unfathomable violence. My internship at the Emmett Till Interpretive Center fostered my love for social justice. The tragedy of Emmett Till's life spurs me to action, just as it did for those who worked for change through the Civil Rights Movement.



I have also redesigned and enhanced websites, created software, and improved the use of technology for many nonprofits to ensure they accomplish their missions and their impact felt. This includes the Nashville Bail Fund, whose importance is better understood in the wake of the death of George Floyd and greater social consciousness on the Black struggle. These volunteer efforts have been a productive and constructive way to apply my abilities to their needs.

At the Mississippi Alliance for Nonprofits and Philanthropy, I served as a Data Analytics and Design Intern. I used various software, such as SQL and Python, to inform data-driven policy and management decisions to over 1,600 nonprofits that the organization serves in the state. I also used Figma and Adobe Illustrator to create designs for promotional materials for its YouTube channel and broader organizational materials. My most enriching experience was participating in the network's Education Affinity Group, where I listened to and learned from some of the most important education-focused minds in the state as they discussed various problems and potential solutions. I continue to attend these meetings, and they have been some of the most eye-opening experiences I have had. The frontline where policy is made and debated is scary; however, the potential for good is so vast that I only get more excited about the future. My focus is education, and my time with the Mississippi Alliance for Nonprofits and Philanthropy solidified that.

To tackle networking and computer science educational issues facing people of color (POC) in Mississippi, I created a nonprofit, Complecto. Through a \$30,000 sponsorship with Hack+, we have been able to set up multiple educational programs across various communities in Mississippi and host the state's first virtual hackathon with over 250 participants. We are currently designing a social network for Mississippi POC to help these incredible individuals achieve their true potential.

I also am a residential advisor at Vanderbilt in a first-year house, which has provided a valuable leadership experience. I am responsible for 30 first-year students, helping them navigate the difficulties of transitioning to college and being independent. Coming from a tough first year myself, I view this as an opportunity to help others avoid my same mistakes. I hope to become the Head Resident of my house next year, providing more opportunities to create programs to benefit the residents.

Volunteering regularly at local food banks and teaching as a volunteer at the Susan Grey School on Vanderbilt's campus, a research-oriented school that provides education to students with developmental disabilities or facing economic hardships, has also been a meaningful experience. Through this program, I further fostered a love for teaching and youth development, which I hope to continue to pursue. Leading the Dores in Solidarity

with Palestine organization has provided additional opportunity to teach differently. We not only combat misinformation and demonization of both sides of the conflict but conduct fundraising and other social justice events in conjunction with other minority organizations such as the Black Student Alliance. To date, we have raised over \$15,000 for charities that aim to help children in the conflict.

And through a partnership with Vanderbilt, I am currently creating a wellness-based app for underprivileged children in the Nashville metropolitan area. The app will be rolled out to multiple school systems and provide accessible and age-specific wellness exercises to ease mental health concerns during the isolated reality of the COVID-19 pandemic. Mental health is essential in the modern-day, and underprivileged children are typically not able to afford therapy. This app aims to provide consistent and accessible wellness exercises that can be done both at school and home, serving as an omnipresent source to learn healthy and productive ways to deal with the stresses of life and the current COVID-19 reality.

While I am thankful for these opportunities to help meet critical needs, there is much more I want to accomplish through public service. I suffered greatly from the greed and cowardice of men, and I will use all my power to help prevent another child from going through what I went through. Technology is signaling a greater revolution in this world. I am dedicated to using this incredible tool to alter the education and social justice landscapes to give back to the communities that gave me the strength and drive to continue living in my darkest moments.

In particular, some of the brightest minds I have ever met reside in Mississippi, a state I have learned to love. I want to see the people of Mississippi thrive. At some point in my life, I hope to help set up a foundation to give these incredible people the resources and opportunities they need to reach their potential using technology.

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